

Introduction

Legislative Update

In early March 2005 Senate Bill 500 and House Bill 759 were introduced. Under these acts, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will maintain a statewide birth to age three system of early intervention services through the First Steps program. The statewide system shall include a comprehensive public awareness program to ensure eligible children are identified and evaluated for eligibility. Proposed modifications to the existing program include the following:

- The structure for the delivery of First Steps services will be on a regional basis
- The DESE will promulgate rules providing for family cost participation in the First Steps program, including access to private and public insurance and a fee for participation set by a sliding scale corresponding with the financial resources of the parents or legal guardians
- Any agency that bids for a First Steps regional contract shall provide assurances that
 1. First Steps program services shall be provided, either directly or through contract, to eligible children in its region with the funding it receives
 2. The child's Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) shall include measurements on the family's outcomes toward implementing the child's developmental goals
 3. Transdisciplinary and coaching approaches will be the focus of the IFSP

This Annual Performance Report addresses performance and future plans based on the First Steps program as it is currently structured. If and when legislative changes are made, future plans may need to be altered to address the new structure and additional/modified requirements.

Background

See Missouri's Part C Annual Performance Report for July 1, 2002 through June 30, 2003 for a description of the evolution of Missouri's Part C system. The following outline is a summary of Missouri within the frameworks of OSEP's continuous improvement process.

• Missouri Self-Assessment (SA):

- Organized by cluster areas, components and indicators provided by OSEP. Began the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process (CIMP)
- Steering committee was a subcommittee of the SICC
- Subcommittee and DESE wrote the SA
- Finalized and submitted to OSEP: October 2002
- OSEP response: March 2003
 - **Major findings:** Child find, correction of previous noncompliance, timelines

• Missouri Improvement Plan (IP):

- Established benchmarks/targets and activities for 2003-04 – 2008-09
- **Priority areas:**
 - Child find
 - Correction of non-compliance
 - Timelines
 - Part C monitoring system
 - Interagency agreements
 - Personnel
 - Service coordination
 - Evaluation/assessment
 - Family-centered services

- Early childhood transition
- Part C IP was combined with the Part C APR for 2001-2002
- Submitted to OSEP: July 2003
- OSEP response: May 2004
 - **Major findings:**
 - Identification and correction of all noncompliance in all agencies that carry out Part C
 - All eligible children are identified, located and evaluated
 - Evaluation and assessment completed within 45 days of referral
 - Additional data collection and reporting needs to better analyze child, family and program data for public awareness and child find and other programmatic purposes and to assess and improve child and family outcomes
 - Requires an interim progress report by October 31, 2004, and a final report no later than June 6, 2005
- **OSEP Verification Visit:**
 - December 2003 - Looked at monitoring, assessment and data collection for Parts B and C
 - OSEP response: May 2004
 - Identification and correction of all noncompliance for all agencies
 - Need better data collection on personnel and child and family outcomes
- **Missouri Annual Performance Report (APR):**
 - Performance report for 2002-03 and future activities for 2003-04
 - Combines data reporting/analysis and improvement planning into one document
 - Organized by clusters, questions (components) and probes (indicators)
 - Largely a repeat of the IP since both covered the same “future” period
 - Submitted to OSEP: April 2004
 - OSEP response: October 2004
 - Requires **items to be addressed in 2003-04 APR**, including
 - Service coordination is provided for every child with an IFSP
 - IFSPs include all necessary services and all identified services are provided
 - Transition planning conference requirements are met
 - Data on improved and sustained functional abilities is collected and analyzed
- **DESE Part C Interim Progress Report:**
 - Dated October 31, 2004
 - Response to OSEP’s May 2004 response to 2001-02 APR/IP and verification visit and OSEP’s October 2004 response to 2002-03 APR
 - OSEP response: January 14, 2005. Requires the **2003-04 APR** to report on the following with **final report due by June 6, 2005:**
 - Progress in identifying and correcting all noncompliance
 - Progress in ensuring compliance in identifying, locating and evaluating all eligible infants and toddlers
 - Additional information on “acceptable reasons” and progress in correcting noncompliance with the 45 day timelines

Need for SPOE System Changes

SPOEs and service coordinators are the keys to success or failure of the redesigned First Steps program. Several challenges have arisen since implementation of Phase 1 in April 2002. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Because SPOEs were contracted through the Missouri Office of Administration, contract changes required a re-bid to make adjustments to the contracts when circumstances indicated a need for adjustments.

- SPOE bids contained estimated staffing needs based on estimated numbers of children to be served. It appears that the original estimates of children were low, so some SPOEs did not have adequate staff to handle all referrals in a timely manner and the contract could not be amended to allow for staffing adjustments.
- Some SPOEs experienced large staff turnover, and the time needed to replace and train staff put them out of compliance on timelines.
- Administrative oversight of ongoing service coordinators and providers was not built into the redesigned system.

Due to these limitations of the original SPOE design, a new contract to address the concerns was implemented in July 2004 for Phase 1 SPOEs. This new contract, which involved changes to SPOE catchment areas, has resulted in significant improvements in child find, timelines and service delivery. Changes seen due to the new contract are discussed under the various clusters and probes. See the Part C APR for 2002-03 for excerpts from the request of proposal for the Phase 1 re-bid. Plans were in place to re-bid Phase 2 SPOEs and put in place a contract and structure similar to the new Phase 1 SPOE contract, however plans are being reconsidered due to the filing of legislation proposing changes to the First Steps program.

Under the new SPOE contract that is in place in three regions of the state (serving approximately half of the state's child count), SPOE administrators have the following responsibilities:

- Organize, develop, and appoint a Regional Interagency Coordinating Council,
- Develop, implement, maintain, and continuously evaluate child find,
- Develop, implement, and maintain a system of provider recruitment,
- Monitor the completion of service provider training,
- Conduct personnel evaluations on service coordinators,
- Assist the state agency with investigation of provider complaints, and
- Assure implementation of any corrective action.

SPOE Software Changes

The Part C APR for 2002-03 indicated that a new web-based software system (webSPOE) was scheduled to be implemented on July 1, 2004. Due to the significant number and type of changes that are being built into the web-based system, the new software is not yet available, and is tentatively scheduled to be released in the Spring/Summer of 2005. The most significant reason for the delay was the decision to make the system an online process that contains all elements of referral, evaluation, eligibility determination, and IFSP development and implementation. The system is very compliance driven and will ensure compliance with regulations as well as best practices to the extent possible. The impact of the new software on the quality and quantity of available data to enhance program and monitoring efforts will be discussed under the various clusters and probes.

Development of IFSP Quality Indicators Rating Scale

Missouri has developed, in collaboration with stakeholders, National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC) staff, and national experts, an *IFSP Quality Indicators Rating Scale*. The QIRS was designed to be used by the Part C program in Missouri for accountability and performance monitoring purposes. The QIRS addresses each area of the IFSP document in a Likert scale fashion, with "1" representing Unacceptable, "3" representing Acceptable, and "5" representing Recommended Practice. Each Likert scale item has a descriptor for determining into which category the IFSP fell for each area evaluated. The quality review results will identify areas of strengths and concerns in IFSPs reviewed and aggregate data for the overall quality of IFSPs developed in each System Point of Entry geographic catchment area. Under the new Phase 1 SPOE contract, the state will award incentive dollars to a SPOE region that demonstrates "high quality" IFSPs as determined by the ratings on the scale and meets or exceeds the performance standards identified in the contract.

The Part C program state staff intends to evaluate the effectiveness of the *IFSP Quality Indicators Rating Scale* and the review process during 2004-05. Based on experience and feedback, the instrument and/or review process may be revised. Subsequently, the Missouri Part C program intends to incorporate the use of the *Missouri First Steps IFSP Quality Indicators Rating Scale* into the statewide monitoring and accountability system for use statewide in 2005-06.

Explanation of “Future Activities” sections

- New Cluster/Probe – Refers to clusters, questions and probes required by OSEP
- Future Activities to Achieve Projected Targets – More detailed activities which will lead towards attainment of targets
- Projected Targets/Evidence of Change – The measurement of progress for the activities
- Projected Timelines – Anticipated completion date for the activities
- Resources – The sections responsible for completing the activity
 - CISE – Center for Innovations in Education
 - CMS – Compliance Monitoring System database
 - Comp – Compliance
 - Data – Data Coordination
 - DSE Staff – various Division of Special Education staff members
 - EP – Effective Practices
 - Funds – Funds Management
 - Monitoring System – System for monitoring all elements of the First Steps program
 - SPOEs – System Points of Entry
 - Consultants – First Steps Regional Consultants